

THE UNION TALKS

NEW HEALTHCARE BENEFIT ADDED!!!

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This is an MGH employee-produced monthly newsletter. It will report union activities and issues from MGH employees represented by SEIU United Healthcare Workers-West.



Letters and suggestions are welcome- send to dillwood@sbcglobal.net

Ellen Dillinger, Editor

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An online copy of this newsletter as well as information and photographs of Sacramento union events can be seen at

<http://dillingertoons.net>

At a time when many American workers are losing health benefits, SEIU-UHW members at CHW hospitals state-wide are celebrating the addition of a **new** healthcare benefit. In a bargained Settlement Agreement reached August 9th, union members gained a retiree medical health plan that is one of the best in the healthcare industry. Prior to the agreement, employees had no health insurance after retirement—now union members with 15 or more years of service have access to a guaranteed issue retiree health plan to supplement Medicare when they retire at age 65.

To pay for the plan, CHW will contribute money to an eligible employee's 401-a account. The amount of the contribution is based on the employee's age at retirement and years of service. The money is intended to pay for premiums on the supplemental health plan, (or COBRA if the employee retires before 65), but belongs to the employee within 45 days of their effective retirement date, to do with what they will.

At the start of bargaining in April, the SEIU and CHW proposals were far apart, but both agreed on the goal of making CHW the Employer of choice in the healthcare industry. They also agreed



At 0530 hours, August 9, the SEIU-UHW Statewide bargaining team signed a Tentative Agreement with CHW on medical retiree benefits. Celeste (Woodland) smiles, while Gary (St. Francis) and Elaine (Woodland) sign the agreement.

that a medical retiree benefit was important in order to attract and retain employees.

To give employees incentive to stay at CHW, the CHW contribution to the employee's 401-a is much greater for those who hold off retirement until age 65. The Agreement also requires that to be eligible for the retiree health benefit, employees must work at CHW for at least 1000 hours/year (slightly less than part-time) for the last 5 years of service.

There are several important dates to remember:

1) The agreement takes effect January 1, 2007. If

you want to be eligible for the 401-a contribution, don't retire until after that date!

2) There is a one-time exception to the eligibility requirements for this benefit, allowing those who've worked less than 1000 hours/year in the last 2 years to qualify. If you think you do, send an application to the Employer no later than Nov.1, 2006. (See Field Rep for details).

Congratulations to all on this new health benefit!

-Ellen Dillinger, Imaging

EDUCATION FUND PROVIDES TRAINING

New laws regulating the healthcare industry often require new actions on the part of healthcare workers. In April 2006, new regulations for phlebotomists came into effect, requiring them to have a State Phlebotomy Certificate.

To obtain a certificate, experienced phlebotomists had to meet certain criteria, including the completion of 20 hours of classroom instruction and passage of a written exam. New phlebotomists are required to complete 40 hours of instruction, 40 hours of practical training, and pass the written exam to obtain a certificate.

To help experienced phlebotomists get certified and to train new ones, a program was established by The

Education Fund, a partnership between SEIU-UHW and healthcare employers such as CHW, designed to provide education and training.

In Sacramento, phlebotomy training started in April of 2006 and lasted 8 weeks. It was free and there was a guaranteed job at the end for those who successfully passed the certification exam. 300 applicants applied for five MHS openings in the program. The number of openings was determined by the number of available phlebotomy jobs.

The Education Fund started four programs this year: 1) Career counseling and assessment, 2) Stipend program, 3) A medical terminology class, and 4) Certified

Phlebotomy technician training.

Career counseling and assessment is a one-on-one session intended as a gateway to other services provided by The Fund.

The stipend program allows eligible students enrolled in nursing, professional and technical courses to be paid their normal wage for up to 8 hours/week while they go to school. It is designed to give eligible employee/students a day or some hours to devote to their training without losing pay.

For more info on the Education Fund and these programs, call 888/872-4606.

--Ellen Dillinger, Imaging/MGH

LETTER FROM A SUCCESSFUL PHLEBOTOMY STUDENT

For 15 years, I've been an employee here at Mercy General Hospital—two years as a nursing assistant at Mercy Care and 13 years in Ortho/Med Surgery. Then, a big opportunity came up—the chance to take a phlebotomy course (offered as joint training by SEIU and CHW), and become a certified phlebotomy tech (CPT).

It was a long process. Weeks went by, and at the conclusion of the class, I was scared and excited—should I go ahead with it? It was a hard decision to leave the Ortho/Med

Surg floor that I called home. My co-workers, supervisor, and manager, Page West were very supportive. It was hard to say goodbye to people I love.

But, I did it, with the support from all the people I know, including my family, and especially my 8 year old son. My son helped me with a presentation I needed for the class, by drawing a whole skeleton for me, and labeling it.

Also, a special thank-you to SEIU. Without this Union, I would not be

where I am now. I just graduated on June 23, 2006 as a Phlebotomy tech. Thanks to CHW and my instructor, Candra and Geneva, and to Ron Turner (Lab), who is knowledgeable and was very patient during my extern. Thank you all—you made a big difference in my life!

To my co-nursing assistants—Look around and grab the opportunities! We can all do it!

Trinidad Sidrome, C

SUPPORTING CANDIDATES WHO SUPPORT US

Well, folks, it's that time of year again-- we will be out in the streets by the thousands pretty soon, registering people to vote, precinct walking and phone banking to elect the candidates we've chosen to support. How did we choose them? Earlier this year, union members were invited to the Community Center where they got the chance via statewide videoconference to ask questions of candidates for statewide office. This summer, our union and the Central Labor Council held a candidates' night, where interested union members were invited to meet and interview candidates running for local public office, such as SMUD and the School Board.

The Political Action Committee (PAC) then votes to recommend candidates. Phil Angelides was chosen as the best candidate for the Governor's



office. Phil has proven he will work to support working people. He will not raise taxes on the middle class-- the only increase will be for those in the top 3% of wage earners. He is committed to tackling the big issues we face in healthcare.

During a recent interview at the F Street Union Hall, Phil stated that he

supports universal health care, the safe staffing bill, and full funding for home healthcare services. When an enthusiastic member of the audience said "You're going to win, Phil!", he responded "We're going to win!" If Phil wins, working people win.

We need your support to elect officials who will be on the side of working people. We will be phone banking and precinct walking out of the SEIU-UHW Union office at 1911 F Street, starting the day after Labor Day.

When we call you, please volunteer a couple of hours of your time to help create better conditions for all working people. With all of our help, Phil is going to win!

Sharon Martinez,
COPE Chair/Alt. Rep. Chair
SEIU-UHW, MGH

UNION LOBBY DAYS AT THE STATE CAPITOL

An important part of our union's work is lobbying the State legislature on issues important to healthcare workers. This lobbying is most effective when done by people like ourselves, who actually work in healthcare and can see the results of government laws on patient care. The legislatively mandated staffing ratio for RNs changed life as we know it in our hospitals. What would life be like if we had a safe staffing law for other hospital employees?

With the goal of educating state legislators on healthcare issues and educating union members on how to lobby, three Tuesdays in August were designated by our union as Lobby Day at the Capitol. On these days, union members from CHW hospitals and Kaiser took a trek through the State Capitol and spoke with

various legislators, both Democrat and Republican, regarding Assemblywoman Chan's bill for safe staffing (AB2745). This bill would require hospitals to have a plan for adequate technical and professional staffing levels.

We also spoke with legislators about a funding bill for the seismic retrofitting of our hospitals, due in 2013.

Lobby Day was educational for us and, we hope, for the legislators.



Martha (St.Jo's in Stockton) and another UHW member informed Assemblymember Alan Nakanishi (10th District) of our views on safe staffing and the earthquake retrofitting bill.

--Ellen Dillinger, Imaging/MGH

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THE UNION TALKS

MGH Steward Chairs

Chief Steward
Raj Dayal
Home: 729-8187
Work: 453-4084

COPE Chair (alt. Chief)
Sharon Martinez
Home: 372-2145
Work: 453-4440

Mobilizer Chair
Kathy Stegall
Home: 682-0844
Work: 453-4553

Secretary Chair/Editor
Ellen Dillinger
Home: 441-3468
Work: 453-4138

SEIU UHW-West Field Representative:

Josie Summers: 275-6342

See list of Shop Stewards on Main Union bulletin Board near Cafeteria.

STEWARDS MEETINGS

**Every third Wednesday,
Time: 2 p.m.- 5 p.m.
LOCATION VARIES**

It is the responsibility of the shop steward to inform their dept. manager in a timely manner of release time required for shop stewards' meeting.

Sept 27: REGIONAL SHOP STEWARDS' MEETING.

**WHEN 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
WHERE: Union Hall
1911 F Street
Sacramento, CA**

**Oct 18: 4101 J St
Employee Health
Conference Room**

**Nov 15 Greenhouse A&B
Dec 20 Greenhouse A&B**

SEIU-UHW Chief bargainer, Morgan Gay wrote many proposals and counter-proposals as the bargaining session wore on. Though bargaining started on August 8th, it wasn't until 0245 hours on August 9th that CHW made a serious move towards a satisfactory final settlement. On both sides of the bargaining table, changes that were neatly typed when bargaining started became hand-written scribble by night's end.



Ellen, Cora, Josie, and Sharon at the voting info table.

The vote to ratify the Tentative Agreement occurred at SEIU-represented CHW hospitals statewide. At MGH, it happened on August 16th, in the hospital cafeteria. An information table was set up, and copies of the agreement (and a summary of it) were given to union members. Two members of the bargaining team, Ellen and Nick, were present to answer questions. Members then voted on whether to ratify the Agreement. (They did).

Voting lasted from 0630 hours to 1900, then the ballots were counted. Nick, Sharon, Ellen and Josie are joined here by Sharon Volk, a long-time Mercy employee with 30+ years of service. Two people read the ballots, and two others recorded them. The ratification vote was an overwhelming YES in favor of the agreement.



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